09.4 Prime times – Settling in and transitions

To feel securely settled and ready to learn, children need to form attachments with the adults who care for them, primarily a key person, but others too. In this way they feel part of a community; they can contribute to that community and receive from it. Very young children, especially two and half- to three-year-olds, approach separation from their parent with anxieties, older children have a more secure understanding of 'people permanence' and can approach new experiences with confidence; but also need time to adjust and feel secure. It is the entitlement of all children to be settled comfortably into a new environment.

Rainbow Pre-school follow a three-stage model of settling in based on three key needs:

1. *Proximity* - Babies and young children feel safest when a familiar adult, such as a parent, is present when they are getting used to a new carer and new surroundings. In this way they can become confident in engaging with those experiences independently later on.
2. *Secure base* – Because the initial need for proximity of the parent has been met, babies and young children gradually begin to feel secure with a key person in a new surrounding so that they are able to participate independently for small periods of time.
3. *Dependency* – Babies and young children are able to separate from parents' and main carers when they have formed a secure attachment to their key person who knows and understands them best and on whom they can depend for their needs to be met.

The Pre-school Lead and key person explain the need for settling in and agree a plan with the parents/carer. They write this down and both key person and parents/carers keep a copy. Each day they review the plan and agree what will happen the next day.

Settling-in for babies, children under two and those with SEND

- Start times for young children are staggered to allow sufficient one to one time with each child and parent/carer.
- Young children should at least be at stage 2 of settling before the key person begins settling another child.
- Where a number of children need to start – key persons can start settling one child in the morning and another in the afternoon. In their first week, children who are settling in will not stay all day.
- If a child has been identified as having SEND then the key person/SENCO and parents/carers will need to identify and address potential barriers to settling in e.g. timings of medication and invasive procedures, specific routines and levels of support.

Promoting proximity

- For the first day, the parent/carer attends with the child and does not leave for 1 hour.
- One is sufficient for a child and parent/carer to attend on any one day initially.
- On the first day, the key person shows the parent/carer around, introduces members of staff, and explains how the day is organised, making the parent/carer and child feel welcome and comfortable. They show them the child's folder and start the "Now I am Two/Three" form. The family's details are collated along with the registration form, to ensure all details are correct. Parent/carers are given "moment stars" to share home achievements and explained about the termly meetings to discuss their child's development and work with parent/carers going forward.
- The key person always greets the parent/carer and child. (Shift patterns may need to be adjusted when settling in.)
- The parent/carer is invited to play with their child and the key person spends time with them. As much time as possible is allowed for the key person to do this.
- Over subsequent days, depending how the child is responding, the key person will liaise with the parent and work at the child's pace as to how many hours they are able to cope with and feel safe and settled in the pre-school setting without parents/carers.

Promoting secure base

- When the young child has experienced different times of the day, these are then fitted together to establish continuity of the day.
- The child attends for the whole session. During this time, the key person and parent/carer establish how the child is getting to know the key person. They note when the child seems distressed and when the child is happy and build on this.
- If signs of distress are still apparent then the separation will be approached more slowly, starting with 1 hour sessions, while the key person spends time with the child.
- When the parent/carer leaves, they always say goodbye and say they are coming back. Parents/carers should never slip away without the baby noticing; this leads to greater distress.
- Gradually, time out of the room is extended from 1 to 2 hours and then a full session.
- When the child can comfortably cope with 3 hours session, the key person and parent/carer plan the next stage.
- Parents/carers can be asked to bring in a recently worn tee shirt or scarf that smells of them. Children will often settle if they can smell the familiar smell of the parent/carer. Some parents/carers may agree

to send in a recording of a song that they sing to get their baby to sleep, especially if it is in their home language.

Promoting dependency

- Attachment can be seen when the child shows signs that they are happy to transfer their need to be dependent onto the key person. Key persons look for signs such as the baby being pleased to see them, looking for them when distressed, holding out their arms to be held, establishing eye contact, responding to play, feeding and taking comfort from the key person.
- Parents/carers can now leave their child for longer, until the baby can cope with a longer day.
- After 4-6 weeks, the key person reviews the settling in plan with the parent/carer and discusses how well the child has settled. They discuss problems that may have arisen and plan how they will be overcome. They plan for the next few weeks and set a time to review. As toddlers grow and change so rapidly, meeting every 6 weeks is recommended.

When a parent/carer is unable or refuses to take part in settling in

- Information about the 'settling in' plan is given at the first visit and the reasons are explained.
- If the parent/carer feels that this will be difficult – perhaps another close relative can come in instead.
- Genuine difficulties need to be handled sensitively, but generally speaking this is not an issue where the parent/carer has a choice not to attend with their child. A parent/carer who refuses to take part in settling in may have the offer of the place withdrawn.

Prolonged absences

- If toddlers are absent from the setting for any for periods of time beyond one or two weeks, their attachment to their key persons will have decreased and will need to be built up again.
- Parents/carers are made aware of the need to 're-settle' their children and a plan is agreed.

Three- and four-year-olds

- Most children of this age can move through the stages more quickly and confidently.
- Some children take longer, and their needs for proximity and secure base stages should be accommodated as much as possible.
- Some children appear to leap to dependency/independence within a couple of days. In most cases, they will revert to the need for proximity and secure base. It can be difficult to progress to true dependency/independence and this can be frustrating.

- After the parent/carer attends for an induction meeting with the pre-school lead or deputy and key person, (or in some circumstances a home visit), a settling-in plan is drawn up.
- On the first day, the parent attends with the child and stays for 1 hour, on day two, the child attends 2 hours and the next day they stay for a whole session. We will factor in an afternoon session (including Lunch) if full day care is required.
- If the child shows interest in the activities and is beginning to engage with the key person and other children, the parent/carer spends time in the parent/carer room (if available) to see how the child responds.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to explain to their child where they are going, and that they will return.

For children whose first language is not English

- For many children learning English as an additional language, the stage of proximity takes longer as the child is dependent upon the parent/carers' input to make sense of what is going on.
- If the parent/carer does not speak English, efforts are made to source an interpreter for induction; it will be helpful for them to see around the setting and be clear about their role in interpreting in the play area.
- The settling-in programme is explained to the parent/carer, and it is emphasised how important it is that they stay with the child and talk to him/her in the home language to be able to explain things.
- Through the interpreter, the key person will try to gauge the child's level of skills in their home language; this will give the key person an idea of the child's interests and levels of understanding.
- The need for the parent/carer to converse in the child's home language is important.
- The key person makes the parent/carer feel welcome using smiles and gestures.
- With the parent/carer, make a list of key words in the child's home language; sometimes it is useful to write the word as you would pronounce it. These words will be used with the child and parents/carers will be addressed with 'hello' and 'goodbye' in their language.
- The key person prepares for the child's visits by having a favourite toy or activity ready for the child to provide a means to interact with the child.
- Children will be spoken to as per any other child, using gestures and facial expressions to help.

- When the child feels happy to spend time with the key person (secure base), the parent/carer should spend time outside of the room.
- Progress with settling in will be done as with any other child; it just takes a little longer to reach dependency/independence.